DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 061 813 FL 003 041

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TITLE Initial Reading in Spanish for Bilinguals.
INSTITUTION Laval Univ., Quebec. International Center on Bilingualism.
PUB DATE Nov 71
NOTE 19p.; In "Conference on Child Language," preprints of papers presented at the Conference, Chicago, Illinois, November 22-24, 1971, p501-519

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; *Bilingual Education; Bilingualism; Dialects; Early Childhood Education; Educational Experiments; Instructional Materials; Mexican Americans; Program Evaluation; Pronunciation; *Reading Programs; Reading Skills; Spanish; *Spanish Speaking; *Teaching Methods; Writing

ABSTRACT

"Initial Reading in Spanish" is a project designed to produce a detailed, descriptive analysis of procedures used to teach Spanish-speaking children in the United States to read in their native language. This document describes the procedures in developing and evaluating such a reading program. The initial step in the program was to observe Spanish reading instruction in several Mexican schools. Observations of procedures and methods used in Mexico were used to devise a program tested in four locations in the United States. Several forms were developed to standardize the procedures for evaluating the program. Extensive videotaping was done in the four experimental classrooms. The final report on the project shows the results of the observations and evaluations made during the project and describes the teaching methodologies that were used. This report summarizes the teaching methodologies and the general results of the project. (VM)

ED 061813

INITIAL READING IN SPANISH FOR BILINGUALS

by

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Ph.D.

1971

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FL 003 041

INITIAL READING IN SPANISH FOR BILINGUALS

For the most part, Title VII programs funded through the Bilingual Office Branch of the U.S. Office of Education focus on development of oral language in children that are served by these programs. Oral language development also is the aim of many other programs for foreign language speaking or non-standard English-speaking children. There are, of course, programs that undertake to teach children to read as well as to develop their oral facility with language. In many cases these programs involve the teaching of reading in English. A number of programs are also in the process of developing reading programs in Spanish.

In an informal series of discussions regarding the teaching of reading in Spanish it was found that relatively little was known about the teaching of reading in Spanish to the Spanish-speaking child, or of the process of transferring reading skills from Spanish to English. As a result of these discussions, and with the encouragement of the Bilingual Branch of the U.S. Office of Education, the project "Initial Reading in Spanish" came into being. The main emphasis of the project was to produce a detailed, descriptive analysis of procedures used to teach Spanish-speaking children to read in their native tongue.

Preliminary investigations into reading programs in the United States revealed that Spanish-speaking children were being taught to read English as well as Spanish utilizing the same procedures that are employed to teach monolingual English speakers to read their native tongue. Many methods in the teaching of literacy in English include ingenious and complex devices to show the underlying system in a written language that is intricate and

often times irregular. The Spanish writing system, on the other hand, has a relatively uncomplicated phoneme-grapheme correspondence with few irregularities. It seems then that many of the methodologies employed to teach literacy in English do not apply to the teaching of that skill in Spanish.

Where does one go to learn methodologies and materials used in effective teaching of literacy in Spanish? What better place than a Spanish-speaking country itself. Mexico, being geographically near and having an education system which responded to initial inquiries enthusiastically, was selected as the site for some preliminary field study of the reading process in Spanish as taught to Spanish-speaking natives. Through the Ministry of Education in Mexico City, arrangements were made to visit a number of schools in which initial reading was being taught to Spanish speakers. A number of classrooms were visited in order to give a generous sampling of procedures used by different teachers. Videotapes were made in each of the selected classes so that a permanent record would be available for reference and study.

Examination of the videotapes revealed the following generalities about the process used by most Mexican teachers observed.

1. A phonic method was used in which children were taught to sound out individual letters in order to decipher words from the printed page. In some cases letter names were used to identify the letters of the alphabet. Some teachers preferred to refer to the letters of the alphabet by their "sound names". The letter "s" was referred to with a syllabant, hissing sound, the letter "d" with the sound "duh", and so forth.
2. Since almost all of the teachers used the textbooks provided by the federal government, the sequence of presentation of vowels and

consonants differed very little. Vowels were introduced initially starting with "o", continuing to "a", "e", "i", and "u". In order that these vowels might be presented in whole words, the consonants "s", "d", "l" and "t" were introduced in the first few lessons. Two or three lessons were spent teaching single words, but the teachers rapidly moved to the presentation of short phrases or sentences in order to teach new letters. In effect, then, children were reading short stories made up of four or five three-word phrases within a week or two from the beginning of reading instruction.

3. Vowel and consonant presentation is normally limited to one vowel or one consonant per lesson. In later lessons several consonants are presented in the same lesson. Apparently, teachers and textbook writers feel that the alphabetic principle has been established in earlier lessons and that children are ready to learn more than one letter at a time.

4. Vowel-consonant clusters are presented in later lessons after all letters of the alphabet have been introduced. The consonant clusters "cr", "gl" and so forth, are normally introduced in combination with the five vowels. A reading is then given in which these clusters appear in combination with the vowels in order that students might practice reading them.

5. An important phase of the instruction is the practice of writing and printing the letters that have been learned in the reading lesson. The reading books used in the Mexican schools incorporate this procedure. There are pages provided facing the reading page on which the students can practice writing and printing the letters

that have been introduced on the previous page. A good deal of time is devoted to this practice. Both work on the board and at individual desks provide opportunities for students to practice their writing and printing skills. It should be pointed out that Mexican students learn cursive and manuscript writing concurrently. Children in the observed classes learned to print and write both upper and lower case letters in the same lesson.

6. In all classrooms the instruction was carried on using the entire group of 40 to 50 children . There were no instances observed of individual reading instruction or of small group reading classes.
7. Student responses were mostly given in choral repetition in the large group. Children often read together as a total class, wrote from dictation given by the teacher and responded en masse to the teacher's questions. In some instances, teachers called children to the front of the room or had them stand at their desks to read aloud to the rest of the class.

   Although the large group instruction sounds formal, there appeared to be an interesting and warm interaction between the teachers and students in Mexican schools. The noise level in such classes was high, but it appeared to be a happy noise or at least one that was generated by work and interested interaction. Teachers readily accepted comments and questions from pupils, although the questions may have been irrelevant or at least an aside from the work at hand. Often, when a single child was called upon to read or perform at the blackboard, the rest of the class was busy performing the same work at their desks or coaching aloud the student at the board.
8. Because of the emphasis on writing in the reading classes, students

accumulate a large number of worksheets and papers. The Mexican schools put these papers to an interesting use. At the end of the year, the worksheets and papers that students have accumulated are bound into a large book which then becomes the property of the student. According to the teachers who were interviewed, the book serves as a review reader for the student, and in several cases, serves to teach others in the same family to read at home.

The aforementioned description of the reading process employed in Mexican schools is a generalized one. There were, of course, variations from this generalization. For example, a school in Mexico City identified as an experimental school was using Gategno's words in color to teach reading. Another class in the same school was studying a variation of a structural grammar. In other schools, a type of language-experience program was being utilized to teach reading. One set of videotapes recorded in Mexico City presents an entire method, with demonstrations by several teachers, of a syllable based phonic reading program. In all of the reading programs mentioned above, much attention is paid to the traditional phonic reading program. This is the way that reading has been taught in Mexico and any new methods seem to refer back to the phonic method. This is also understandable since the Spanish graphic system is a fairly regular one, thereby making it more feasible than English to sound out words.

There was one variable that could not be considered in the investigation of initial reading in Spanish in Mexico; that variable was the student's language. In Mexico, all of the students were monolingual Spanish-speaking children. For our purposes and for the application of the reading techniques that we had discovered in Mexico, it was necessary to consider the language and abilities of children who were bilingual, English-Spanish speakers.

For this reason the initial reading in Spanish for the bilingual program was conceived. The idea behind the program was to teach bilingual English-Spanish speaking children to read in Spanish, utilizing the same methods, materials and other devices that were used by teachers in Mexico. The project was designed so that it could accumulate information regarding the teaching of initial reading in Spanish in a systematic fashion. The information was to be taken from observation reports, teachers' lesson plans, anecdotal records and analyses of the teaching practices used by the native Spanish-speaking, foreign-trained teachers of initial reading in Spanish. The project was sponsored by a grant from the United States Office of Education under funds from the Title VII Bilingual Program Branch. Four field sites were selected at which the project teachers would carry out their instruction. The children to be included in the classes were to be fluent speakers of Spanish who were entering public school as first grade students. The project was hosted by the Houston Independent School District with the first of the sites located in that city in a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood. The other sites were in the cities of San Antonio, Alice, and Abernathy, Texas. Some of the children in the study were to be regular members of a bilingual education program while others would receive no extraordinary instruction other than initial reading in Spanish.

Since collecting information was the primary goal of the project, several forms were developed to standardize the procedures for data collection. The first of these, the observation form, was used by the observer-recorder who sat daily in the classroom as the initial reading in Spanish instruction was carried out. The observer-recorder's observations were guided by the categories contained on the observation form. These categories included: (1) "object naming," in which the recorder would write any nouns

that were given special emphasis or explanation in the classroom; (2) "question words," in which interrogatives were recorded; (3) "gender and number influence on verbs," in which verb endings were recorded; (4) "object description," in which adjectives were listed; (5) "words that indicate position or direction," a category in which function words were recorded. From these categories a vocabulary list was composed at the end of the project. The list is basically one that contains all of the words that were given special emphasis in the classes and an indication of their frequency on a scale from one to five.

In addition to these categories, the observation form contained sections where information regarding the types of exercises or activities could be recorded. The additional categories of words with multiple meanings and idiomatic speech allowed the observer-recorder to preserve the occurrence of such language usage. The observation forms were filled out daily in each of the classes. The final report of the project contains lists of each of these categories taken from the observation forms from each of the sites. An interesting portion of the final report is that of the pupil-teacher dialectal differences. A list of the conflicts between the language used by the teachers in the classroom and that of the students was recorded. These dialectal differences include slang, local substitute words or synonyms for standard items.

The remaining dialectal differences that were reported can be classified into the following four groups: (1) archaic forms--words carried down from old Spanish which because of the isolation of Mexican-Americans from other Spanish-speaking people have remained in use; (2) anglicisms--words taken from English and adapted to Spanish wherever there was a need for the word; (3) interchanged letters--words in which certain letters have been

used in the wrong order or position and (4) pronunciation errors made because of the substitution for the letters "f", "h", and "j".

Dialectal differences also are accumulated in the final report in the form of a word list that separates the differences according to frequency, and identifies them as to the site or sites at which the forms were used.

Another form was used to record pupil pronunciation errors. In this case, the error was one produced when a child attempted to read a word from the text or materials supplied by the teacher. In general, the kinds of pronunciation errors that were observed reflected some of the dialectal differences that were reported previously. The final report presents these pronunciation errors in a list that is coded according to frequency and geographic location as to where the pronunciation errors occurred.

A complete description of the materials that were used in the project is also contained in the final report. The basic texts are listed and described in terms of their use in the classroom. The Mexican reading teachers were permitted complete freedom in the selection of textbooks. At the initial meeting with the teachers at the beginning of the year, the teachers as a group agreed that they would like to use the same textbooks furnished them by the federal government in Mexico. Because of the fact that these texts are not readily available in the United States through import, an alternate set of texts were selected. The textbooks which they selected were very similar in format to those published by the federal government in Mexico. The three basic books used by all four teachers were: Mi Libro Magico, a basic reader with provision for writing and printing practice; Mis Primeras Letras, a supplementary practice book and reader; and Felicidad, a reader and book of activities. Some supplementary books also were selected, as well as a small library of readers or read to books. A detailed list of

these books as well as their sources is listed in the final report of the project.

Care was taken to preserve all of the games, rhymes, songs, stories, and other devices used by the teachers in their classes. In the case of games, the name and the rules for playing the game are given in the final report. Rhymes and their use also are given in the report and listed in an index. Songs, for the most part, are referred to by name with the verse occasionally given if the song is not generally known.

Each teacher was requested to submit lesson plans weekly, samples and summaries of which are reproduced in the final report of the project. Some evaluations of materials and description of specially-made materials also are included in the teachers' reports. The teachers employed a large number of specially prepared forms and charts. A description of these and their texts are supplied in the teachers' reports.

One appendix of the final report summarizes the sequence of presentation of letters of the alphabet. The reports of the observer-recorders contain anecdotal records of the presentation of the letters by the teachers at the different sites. When a teacher employed specific and unique methods to teach the formation of vowels or consonants, it was reported in detail in the observer-recorder reports. The final report contains the rhymes, special instruction or games used in the teaching of the letter shapes.

Because the use of children's writing was so extensive, samples of children's handwriting are also included in the final report. Observers of the videotapes and samples often are impressed by the quality of the children's handwriting, particularly the examples of cursive writing, since children in the United States normally are not taught cursive forms until the third grade. The samples of the children's writing taken from the Texas

classrooms compares favorably with the samples shown on the videotapes recorded in Mexico City.

Summary Analysis of Teaching

Classes began in most of the sites in September of 1970. The general pattern for class organization and teaching sequences was similar at each of the sites. This was to be expected, since all four of the teachers had been trained in Mexico in similar teacher-training institutions. At each site, an initial period varying from a few days to two weeks was used to accomplish some pre-reading practice. Teachers used songs, games and other instructional materials during this period.

Extensive videotaping also was done in the four classrooms in Texas. This technique permitted re-examination of a class session and has also allowed us to preserve examples of the teachers' work. These videotapes have been assembled into eight videotapes of approximately 15 to 30 minutes each in length. Each of the tapes shows samples of a specific technique or techniques employed by teachers in the Texas project. One tape, for example, presents several different class sessions in which the teachers are using writing as a reinforcement for reading practice. Another shows teachers using reading charts to teach children to read sentences in sequence to form a logical paragraph. Duplicates of these tapes are available to interested educational agencies.

The following summary is a compilation of the largest section of the report in which the teaching methodologies used in the Texas classrooms are described.

1. When actual reading instruction began, all teachers taught vowels first. The teachers all used a phonic method to introduce the vowels. Rhymes were used as mnemonic devices to help children

associate the sound of the letter with its graphic symbol. Like the teachers in the Mexico City classrooms, the Texas teachers referred to the letters of the alphabet by their sounds.

2. Consonants were then taught until the entire alphabet had been presented, using the sound of each letter to identify it, rather than a letter name. This practice was common to all the teachers. Needless to say, vowels and consonants were not introduced in the same order at each site. There was, however, a general consensus among the teachers for sequence of individual letter presentation which reflected the teachers' preference for the State textbooks in Mexico. The pattern consisted of presenting the vowel sounds as quickly as possible, followed by presentation of some consonant sounds and letters to make up simple sentences that the children could read. The teachers paid careful attention so that each child produced the sound of each letter as it was introduced. The reading "lesson" consisted of presenting the word oso and teaching the children the identification of that letter form with its sound. Other words were introduced which contained the new letter in the initial position.

3. The teachers generally focused on the practice of sounding out words letter by letter. When children hesitated or stumbled in reading, the teacher would help them sound out each letter of the word, and then blend those letters into the pronunciation of the word in question. One of the teachers used the practice of multiple repetitions of a word so that children could memorize its pronunciation. This amounted to rote learning. The practice, however, was limited to one classroom of the four and did not seem to be a general practice

used by Mexican teachers. Drill on individual words or letters usually was accomplished through games, songs and repetition. Whole class participation, however, was the most commonly used mode of classroom instruction.

4. Much of the work in these games, songs and repetitive drills was done using the entire class in a choral repetition. Individual children were called upon to point out letters as the class sounded out the words. Children often were called to the front of the room to point to a letter or a sentence on a chart.
5. The use of writing as a reinforcement of reading instruction was one of the most singularly outstanding practices in the program. Pre-reading instruction included practice in the basic movements needed for handwriting. This involved large motor movement practice usually accomplished at individual desks. The students were asked to write letters in the air or on their desk tops, using their finger tips. Some of the other practices included writing at the board, usually by one child, while the rest of the class practiced the movements in the air or on their desk tops.

Group handwriting practice began with the first letters and words that were introduced for reading. The children were provided practice sheets on which to copy words and letters from the board or from their reading lessons. From the beginning, both manuscript and cursive forms of upper and lower case letters were presented simultaneously and then practiced by the students. The children progressed from writing single letters to words, phrases and sentences as the reading material in the lessons became more complex. The teachers used dictation frequently to vary the handwriting

skill. Dictation most often was based on familiar sentences that had been previously presented in the reading lessons.

6. The sequence of vowel presentation and consonant presentation differed from classroom to classroom. The general procedure, however, was much the same; the teachers introduced vowels early in the reading instruction, then proceeded to present one new consonant per reading lesson. All the teachers proceeded from single letter introduction to syllables and then to reading words and eventually whole phrases or sentences.

The reading and instructional materials used were selected by the teachers themselves. Their only limitation was the availability of materials. For this reason, the materials used at the four sites were not duplicates of the materials used in the first grade in Mexico. The Mexican federal texts are not available for importation to the United States. Each of the teachers had brought materials with them that they had previously used in Mexico. These materials, particularly the teacher's guides, helped them to establish the sequence of presentation of reading material. The books that they did use were rearranged somewhat so that the order of the lessons coincided fairly closely with the order as seen in the Mexican federal textbooks. The final report includes several indices and charts showing the order in which vowels, consonants, phrases and whole sentences were presented by the teachers.

7. The teachers made extensive use of printed materials for display. Some had brought with them large charts which duplicated whole pages in an enlarged form for presentation to the whole class. All of the teachers prepared supplementary ditto sheets for practice in

reading and writing. These were sometimes pages taken from other texts, and at other times were teacher-made lessons. The chalkboard was used extensively to present written stories for choral reading and for children to practice writing words and sentences that appeared in the reading lessons. Chart and flannel board pictures frequently were used by the teachers for both reading practice and language or concept development. The teachers indicated that the lack of Spanish language development in their American students was one of the basic differences between their classes in Mexico and those that they taught in the United States. The teachers all felt that the bilingual youngsters in their classes had, in general, limited Spanish speaking ability. For this reason, the teachers moved at a slower pace, spending more time on developing oral language than they would have with monolingual Spanish speaking children. The oral language practice was, for the most part, concept or vocabulary development.

8. An interesting phenomenon observed incidentally in the classes was that of the interaction between the students and teachers. In general, the classes seemed noiser than one would expect an American schoolroom to be. Although the class was conducted as a total group learning together rather than in small groups, the teachers seemed, for the most part, permissive in their control of movement about the room and particularly of talking by the students. They readily accepted correct, incorrect and sometimes irrelevant questions or responses from students. The children appeared free to ask questions or make comments during any part of the reading lesson. In some of the classes, students moved freely from their

seats to the teacher, who was standing at the front of the room addressing the class, and after asking a question or making a comment or showing a paper to the teacher, would move back to their seats again and the lesson would continue.

9. Aside from the extensive descriptive analysis resulting from the Initial Reading Program in Spanish, an evaluation was made of the students' progress in learning to read both Spanish and English. The English reading was generally delayed, except in cases where parents or school personnel objected. The evaluation and comparison of reading progress by students in and between the sites was difficult, because of differences in socioeconomic status as well as the distances between the project sites. The sample differences between the various classrooms and the variations in the population densities of the four sites presented further difficulties. Because of these difficulties of across-site evaluation, the general feeling of the evaluator was that the within-site evaluations offer the best probability for interpretation of success of the students in reading. A test was developed to evaluate the Spanish reading progress of the students at all the sites. The results show that the children did indeed learn to read Spanish at a level that was somewhat above average. The conclusion was that their progress in Spanish reading was slightly better than normal progress, with one site showing extremely good progress.

Achievement in reading English was also shown. Only three sites reported on this phase. In one, the children in the initial Spanish reading project learned to read English as well as the control group. In addition, they learned to read Spanish. At the two

other sites, however, the English achievement of the students was somewhat below that of their control group counterparts. The results also established that learning to read in Spanish was related significantly to the ability to learn to read English.

The final report contains the statistical data from various tests and evaluations that were administered in the program. In summary, the results are basically these:

1. The children who scored significantly higher on the Spanish reading test were students participating in both a bilingual education program and the Spanish reading program. Apparently the combination of the two programs resulted in the highest degree of Spanish reading ability. There are many variables to consider in a study, such as ability, socioeconomic status, and educational opportunity. The fact that the other three sites were statistically alike, however, leads to an assumption that the children's success can be attributable to the combination of the bilingual program and the Spanish reading program.
2. In two of the three sites, the control groups had significantly higher English reading ability than did the Spanish reading students. This would seem to indicate that reading ability at this level is a function of the time spent in practice. The control groups did spend more time learning to read English than did the Spanish reading program children. At one site there was no statistical difference, which would lead to support of the theory that children experiencing early success in their reading will make a

significant transfer of those skills to reading in another language.

3. There were significant differences in the English scores from one site to another. The statistics indicate that the one group showing the lower scores were perhaps of slightly lower ability. It also should be pointed out that the teacher at that particular site was the least secure of the four, and relied heavily on rote learning to teach reading.

4. An attempt was made to get an overview of all the reading groups on both English and Spanish tests. The overview indicated there was little difference in the various performances on both tests. This would seem to support the position that the children in the project did learn both English and Spanish reading. A final analysis was made of the relationship between the Spanish reading test scores and the English reading scores. There were strong relationships found which would indicate once again that there are individual differences among children, and those who scored high on the Spanish tests, also scored high on the English test.

The evaluation report contained in the final project report goes into detail concerning the relationships and results reported above. Interpretation of the results, of course, must be cautious. In a program such as the one that I have described, it is extremely difficult to control the many

variables. The interpretations given here and in the report are presented, not as truths, but as stimuli for further investigation.

Enough was found in this project, of both a descriptive and inferential nature, to bring about greater insights into the teaching and learning process as it relates to Spanish speaking bilingual children. It is hoped that the knowledge and information gained through the initial Spanish Reading Project and contained in the final report and the videotapes will stimulate further investigation into what is most certainly an essential area of instruction for bilingual children.